

An Introduction to Globalization Monitor



Globalization Monitor is a non-profit organization based in Hong Kong. It was founded shortly before the Seattle protests against the WTO in 1999. Its editorial board members are activists from trade unions, the green movement, women groups and grassroots organizations. It has been the main organization in HK dedicated to promoting awareness of the negative effects of globalization.

Our Work

1. Publications
2. Public education
3. Campaigning
4. Solidarity with Chinese labour actions

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GP Workers' Four Year Struggle to Defend Their Rights

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About Cadmium



Cadmium is a soft, bluish-white metal. Often found as an impurity in other metal ores, cadmium also naturally occurs in the environment through erosion of soil and rock, forest fires and volcanic eruptions.

Production

Small cadmium rocks

It is mainly produced from the refining and smelting of zinc ore, and in smaller amounts from lead and copper ore. Small amounts also are recovered from recycling iron and steel in the smelting process. China is the current top producer of cadmium.

Toxic Health Effects

Cadmium can be ingested, inhaled or absorbed through the skin. Most safety issues deal with inhalation, as it is responsible for the quickest and highest levels of exposure for workers in factories.

Short-term exposure: nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, muscle cramps, sensory disturbances, liver injury, convulsions, shock and renal failure.

Long-term exposure: kidney, liver, bone and blood damage.



Cadmium oxide



How a battery works

Thin sheets of nickel and cadmium are tightly rolled to form the core. A chemical reaction between nickel hydroxide, cadmium hydroxide and an electrolyte, potassium hydroxide, produces an electrical current.

Source: the Salt Lake Tribune



GP Battery is one of the ten most famous brands in Hong Kong. It is sold in many supermarkets like this one.



The head quarters of Gold Peak Industries (Holding) Ltd in Kwai Chong, Hong Kong. In 2004, it was reported that three workers suffered from cadmium poisoning and 11 workers with excessive cadmium levels at the HK Shi Hui Ltd, a subsidiary of GP Holding.



The Huizhou **Power Pack Ltd** (hereafter PP) in Huizhou, Guangdong. PP is a subsidiary of GP Batteries.

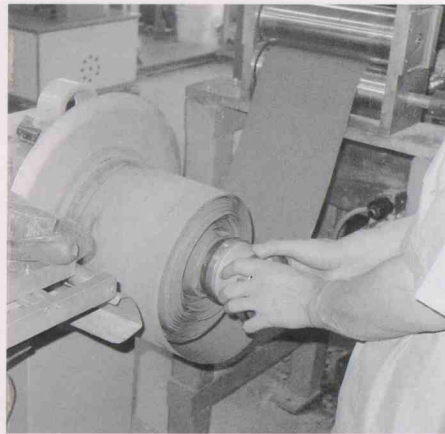


The Huizhou **Advance Battery Technology Ltd** (hereafter ABT) is one of two Huizhou subsidiaries of GP. 400 workers in the Huizhou plants were found to have excessive cadmium levels, in addition to two poisoned. Since then the number of poisoned has steadily increased to 24.



Mr. Victor Lo is the Chairman and CEO of the GP group. In 2005 he was appointed as a member of the Executive Council of the Hong Kong government.

THE CADMIUM POISONING CASES IN FOUR GP AFFILIATED PLANTS WERE NOT ACCIDENTAL. THEY WERE THE RESULT OF CONTINUOUS NEGLIGENCE IN OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY AND NON-COMPLIANCE OF RELATED LAWS ON THE PART OF THE PLANTS. THE MANAGEMENT FAILED TO PROVIDE EFFECTIVE PROTECTION AND OCCUPATIONAL SAFETY TRAINING TO WORKERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW.



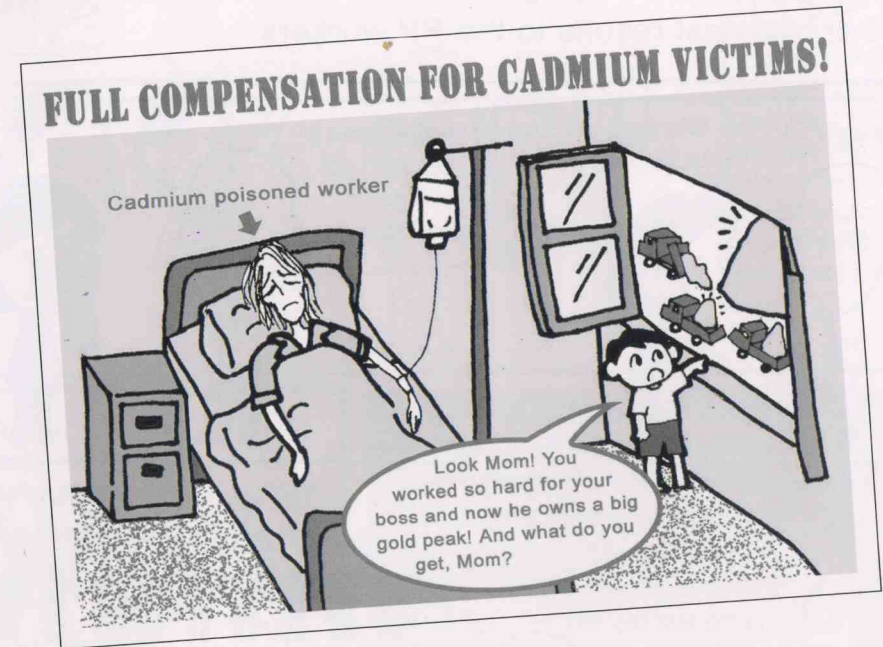
With their bare hands, workers transferred cadmium into negative electrodes.



At the end of 2004, it was revealed that the Shenzhen JetPower Batteries Ltd in Shenzhen, Guangdong, also had 80 workers with excessive cadmium levels and three with cadmium poisoning.





Stand Up for the Truth




Back in March 2003, both the local government and the Huizhou GP plants were already aware of the fact that the latter contained excessive cadmium in their environments. However they failed to notify workers and failed to provide necessary protection to them. The workers found out the truth only after falling ill.

The sick workers in Huizhou PP plant demanded management send them for body check ups but were refused. Their demands were accepted only after the workers went on strike.

Later, workers in different departments and different batches began to know of the dangers of cadmium which they were in contact with everyday. They then pressed the management for body check ups, or medical care if they were certified with excessive cadmium levels. The local government and the plants made things difficult for the affected workers, and the workers had to stand up for their rights at every step. In 2004 alone, 3,000 workers in the two Huizhou plants had to strike, block the roads and petition for 14 times in order to make their case heard.

 In the end of May 2004, the management kept delaying the release of medical test results to the PP workers. 


Manager Liu
Why don't you show us the medical test results?



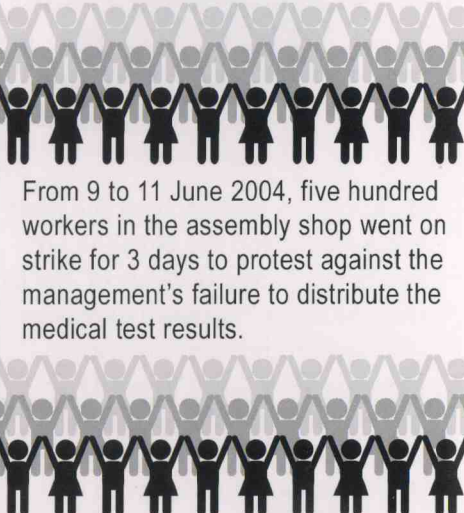
Forget about it! You won't get what you want from us.



Then we will go back to the assembly lines to tell everyone you are withholding the test results!

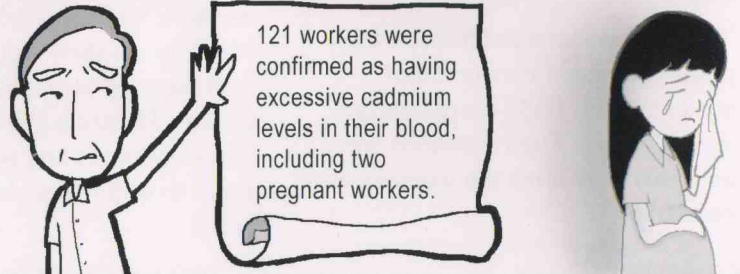


From 9 to 11 June 2004, five hundred workers in the assembly shop went on strike for 3 days to protest against the management's failure to distribute the medical test results.

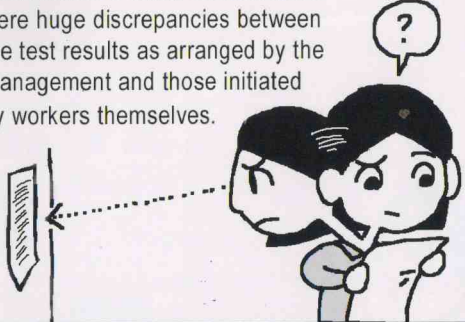


Eventually the management yielded to the workers' action and released the results.

121 workers were confirmed as having excessive cadmium levels in their blood, including two pregnant workers.




Soon workers found out that there were huge discrepancies between the test results as arranged by the management and those initiated by workers themselves.



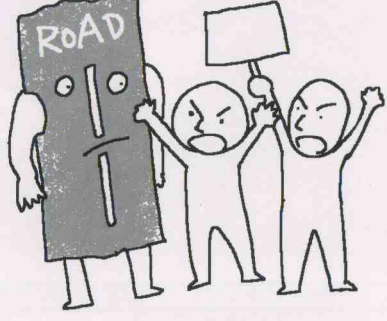
In one case the cadmium in blood of the latter stood at 5 times of the former. Later the same discrepancies existed in the urine test samples as well. The test results which workers paid for were 29 times to 86 times higher than those arranged by the management.

14-18 June 2004, workers at the ABT plant faced similar problems and they also went on strike to press for the release of medical test results. The management just ignored them.

give us the medical test results!!



On 2 July, more than 100 workers blocked the main road in the city. The management finally gave in.



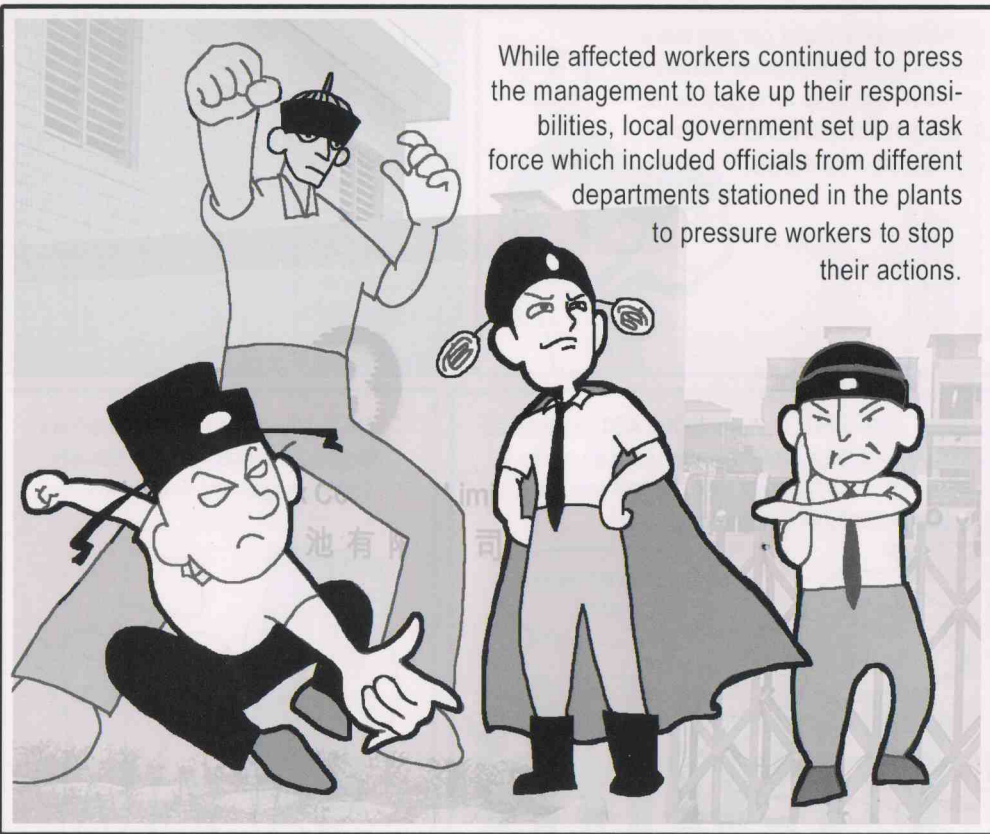
At this time the Globalization Monitor heard the news and then leaked it to the media in Hong Kong.



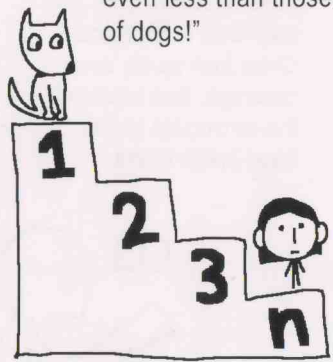
On 3 July the Hong Kong Oriental Daily made the news headline. On 5 July the media in Mainland China took up the news coverage, thus breaking the censorship on the issue inside China.



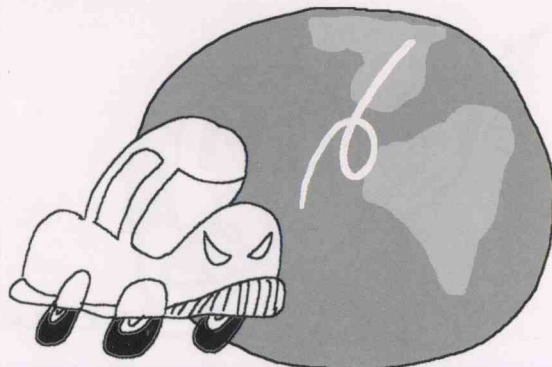
While affected workers continued to press the management to take up their responsibilities, local government set up a task force which included officials from different departments stationed in the plants to pressure workers to stop their actions.



People from the task force told workers: "Your lives are worth even less than those of dogs!"



"If you go on stirring up trouble, you may one day be knocked down by a car, or simply disappear from the earth - you know these are things common here."



金山工業中心 Gold Peak Building

On 23 July, 30 activists from Globalization Monitor, Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions and the Neighborhood and Workers Service Center and a dozen other groups went into the headquarter of the GP group to protest against GP's way of dealing with the issue.

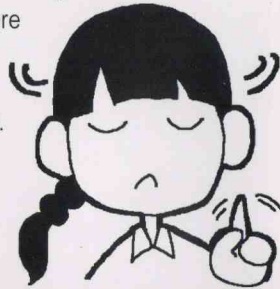




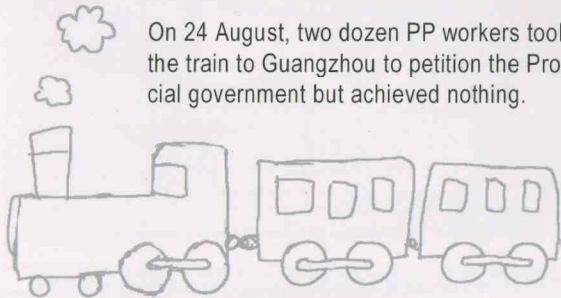
(1) 3,000 – 8,000 yuan 'subsidy' to the affected workers;
 (2) to monitor the cadmium levels of affected workers and to provide treatment for those poisoned.

The workers regarded the 'subsidy' too little. They were also skeptical at the promises of monitoring for those with excessive cadmium levels or treatment for those poisoned, given that the local government has always been biased towards the management.

They therefore refused to accept the proposal.

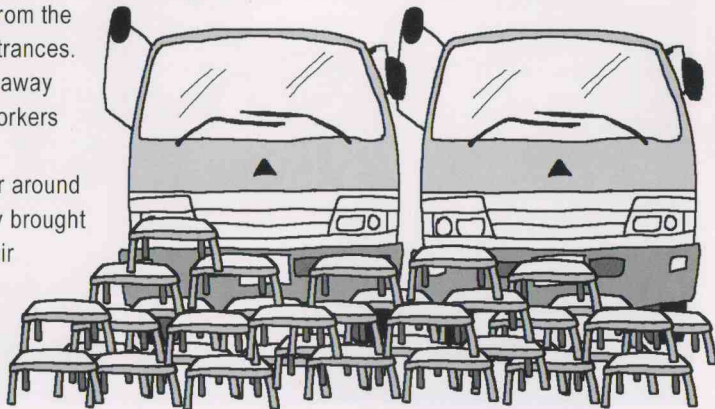


On 24 August, two dozen PP workers took the train to Guangzhou to petition the Provincial government but achieved nothing.

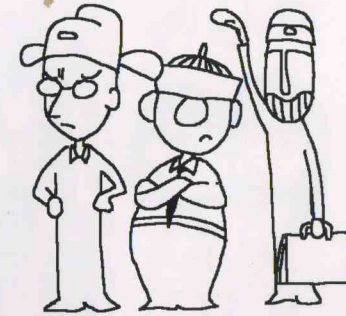
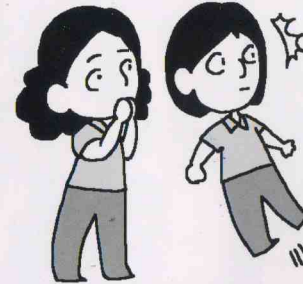
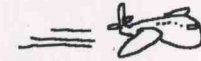


Meanwhile, on 13 July, 500 ABT workers in the assembly shop demanded management send them for tests and then went on strike when the latter refused.

At that time there were two big trucks at the ABT factory door to load finished products. The striking workers stopped the uploading by moving long benches from the canteen to block all entrances. Police arrived to move away the blockade but the workers successfully resisted. The blockade lasted for around two weeks which finally brought the management to their knees and they finally sent workers for medical tests.



On 26 Aug. 2004, 28 PP worker representatives took the train to Beijing to petition the Central government.

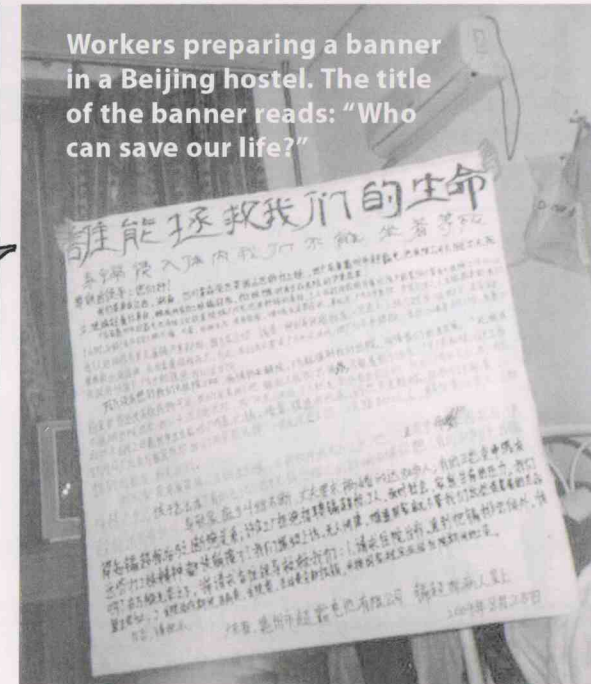


On arrival at the Beijing station, the workers were taken by surprise when they saw Huizhou government officials were already there to meet them. The officials took the plane so they were able to arrive earlier.

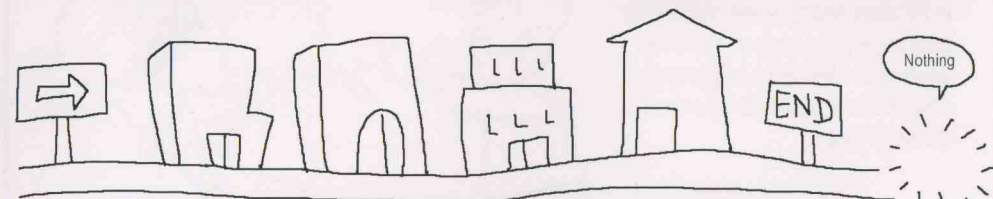
The officials tried to stop them from petitioning but the workers broke through.

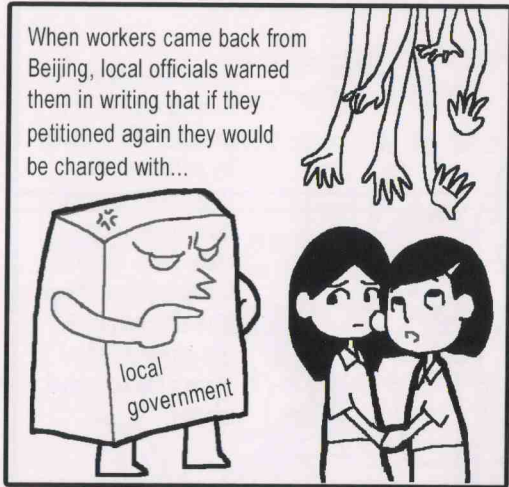


Workers preparing a banner in a Beijing hostel. The title of the banner reads: "Who can save our life?"

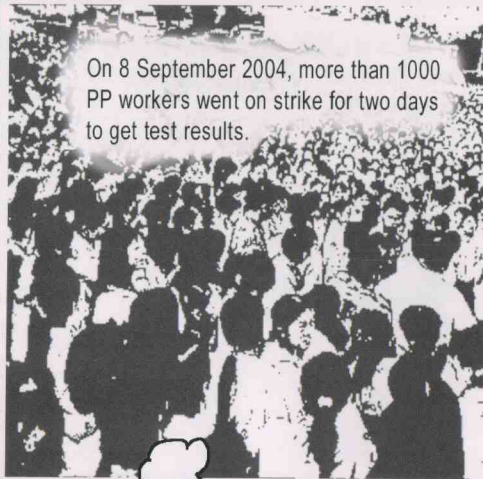


They went to the All China Women's Federation (ACWF), All China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), the State Bureau for Letters and Visits, the Ministry of Labour and Security, the Ministry of Health, the State Administration of Work Safety etc. Their petition ended with no results.

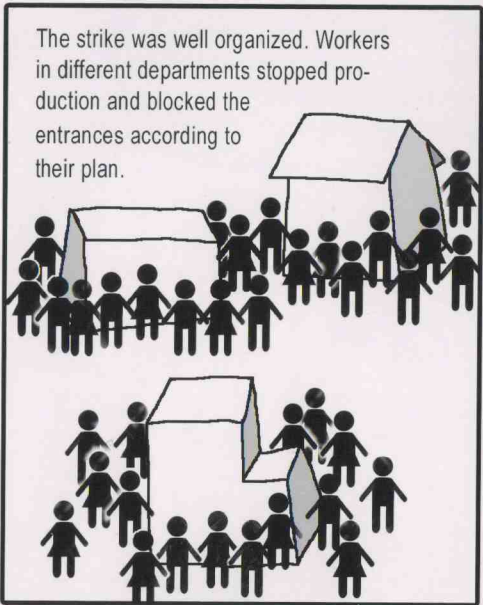




When workers came back from Beijing, local officials warned them in writing that if they petitioned again they would be charged with...



On 8 September 2004, more than 1000 PP workers went on strike for two days to get test results.

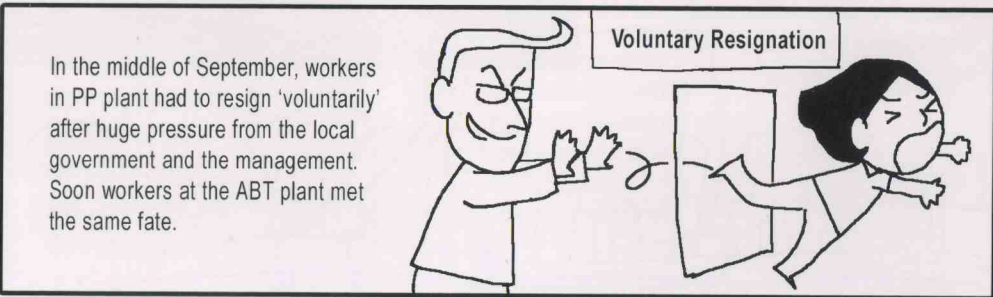


The strike was well organized. Workers in different departments stopped production and blocked the entrances according to their plan.



The young woman worker who controlled the elevator yelled to her brothers and sisters:

I locked the elevator! The bosses can't get out now!



In the middle of September, workers in PP plant had to resign 'voluntarily' after huge pressure from the local government and the management. Soon workers at the ABT plant met the same fate.

Starting from 2005, the ex-GP workers came back every year for medical test as required by law. The management often made things difficult for them and workers often responded with demonstrations like this.



Until recently, there are still 250 workers with excessive cadmium levels. Meanwhile, the number of poisoned has risen from two to 24. The negative effects of cadmium are still there, since a certain proportion of those workers with serious excessive cadmium levels may develop kidney failure in the future.

The case of Wang Fengping

Wang Fengping works as an engineer at the PP plant. When she underwent testing in 2004, she was found to have excessive cadmium levels and her kidney dysfunction reached the level of poisoning. She waited for the management to arrange treatment, but nothing came. In 2006 her kidneys began to fail. She demanded the factory provide treatment for her but was refused. She then sued GP and demanded proper diagnosis. At the end of April 2008 she went to HK to protest against Victor Lo. Many workers are worried that they may meet the same fate.



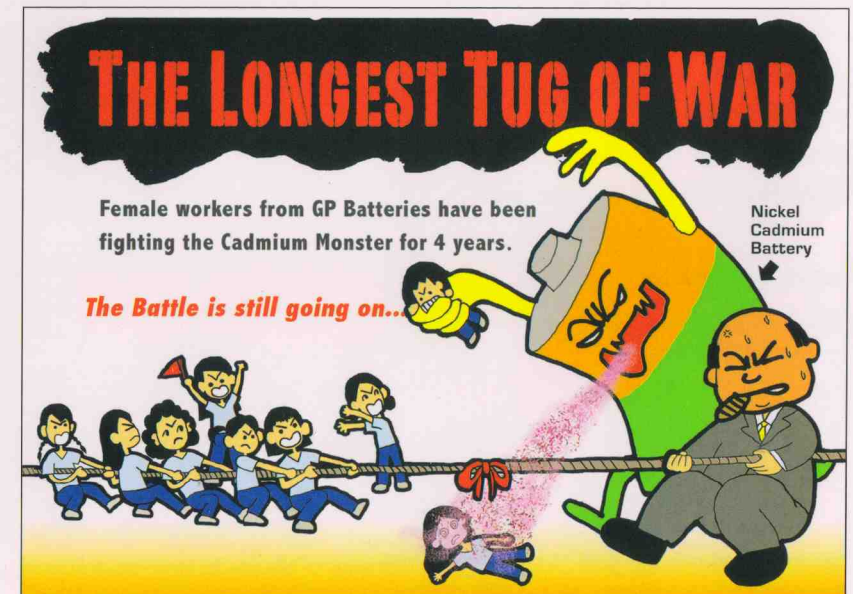
Wang Feng-Ping

Our Responses to Gold Peak Group

What GP says	Our Responses
Workers who had excessive levels of cadmium do not require medical treatment and they can lead normal lives.	This depends on the degree of excessive cadmium levels and the health of the workers. If the degree of cadmium is serious, then the patients probably feel uncomfortable in various ways. Generally 5-20% of people with excessive cadmium levels may develop kidney function abnormalities.
Gold Peak Batteries had already ceased production of nickel cadmium batteries.	It had, however, outsourced nickel cadmium batteries to a factory in Hunan and still profited from selling cadmium batteries.
The Gold Peak Group had set up an industrial safety trust fund of 10 million HK dollars for affected workers.	The problem is how many workers did benefited and how much did they get? The fact was that many workers were not notified at all of the fund. As of April 2006 only 4% of workers received a small amount of the fund. Since then GP has made no public announcement as to how the fund has benefited GP battery workers as a whole. Moreover, the target group of the fund is all occupational disease victims from all the 15,000 employees of the Gold Peak group, not just the affected workers from the four plants which had cadmium poisoning outbreaks. Therefore the amount of 10 million HK dollars should be assessed against this background.

What can you do to help those affected workers?

1. Send an email to Gold Peak Industries (Holding) Ltd to protest against its negligence of occupational safety and its failure to take full responsibility for the workers. You can download a sample protest letter from our website: <http://globalmon.org.hk>
2. Mail the postcard which we made to the Gold Peak group.



3. Tell the news to your family members and friends.
4. Ask yourselves the question when you buy batteries:
Should I buy the products of a company which fails to take full responsibility for its workers?